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Environment and sustainable development

International institutional arrangements related to environment and development

Report of the Secretary-General

I. Introduction

1. At its nineteenth special session in 1997, the General Assembly gathered to review the progress achieved since the convening of the United Nations Conference on Environment and Development, focusing on the implementation of Agenda 21[1] and, in that connection, adopted the Programme for the Further Implementation of Agenda 21 (resolution S-19/2, annex). In paragraph 117 of the Programme, the Assembly stressed that, given the increasing number of decision-making bodies concerned with various aspects of sustainable development, including international conventions, there is an ever greater need for better policy coordination at the intergovernmental level, as well as for continued and more concerted efforts to enhance collaboration among the secretariats of those decision-making bodies. In paragraph 118 of the Programme, the Assembly recommended that the conferences of the parties to conventions signed at the United Nations Conference on Environment and Development or as a result of it, as well as other conventions related to sustainable development, should cooperate in exploring ways and means of collaborating in their work to advance the effective implementation of the conventions. Further in the same paragraph, the Assembly stated that the conference of the parties to or governing bodies of the conventions signed at the Conference, or as a result of it, and of other relevant conventions and agreements should, if appropriate, give consideration to the co-location of secretariats, to improving the scheduling of meetings, to integrating national reporting requirements, to improving the balance between sessions of the conferences of the parties and sessions of their subsidiary bodies, and to encouraging and facilitating the participation of Governments in those sessions, at an appropriate level.

2. Within this context, and pursuant to its decision 52/445 of 18 December 1997, entitled "Progress in the implementation of conventions relating to sustainable development", the Assembly, at its fifty-third session, considered the report of the Secretary-General on ways and means of undertaking the review of progress made in implementing conventions related to sustainable development (A/53/477). In that report, the Secretary-General addressed the issue of coherence among the environment and environment-related conventions at both the inter-agency and intergovernmental levels, and proposed elements of an intergovernmental process that the Assembly might take into consideration in its deliberations on how such a review could be carried out.

3. Subsequently, the General Assembly adopted resolution 53/186 of 15 December 1998, on international institutional arrangements related to environment and development, by which it encouraged the conferences of the parties to, and the permanent secretariats of, the United

99-29937 (E) 291099

Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change,[2] the Convention on Biological Diversity[3] and the United Nations Convention to Combat Desertification in Those Countries Experiencing Serious Drought and/or Desertification, particularly in Africa,[4] to examine appropriate opportunities and measures to strengthen their complementarities and improve scientific assessments of ecological linkages among the three conventions. By the same resolution, the Assembly requested the Secretary-General to prepare a report, for submission to the Assembly at its fifty-fourth session, identifying actions undertaken to implement part IV.A, in particular paragraph 119, of the Programme for the Further Implementation of Agenda 21, as well as the areas requiring further consideration and work, taking into account the roles of relevant organizations and institutions of the United Nations system, as stated in part IV of the Programme.

4. In paragraph 119 of the Programme for the Further Implementation of Agenda 21, the Assembly drew attention to the need, at the international and national levels for, *inter alia*, better scientific assessment of ecological linkages among the conventions; identification of programmes that have multiple benefit; and enhanced public awareness-raising with respect to the conventions. In that regard, the United Nations Environment Programme (UNEP) is called upon to undertake such tasks in accordance with the relevant decisions of its Governing Council and in full cooperation with the conferences of the parties to and governing bodies of relevant conventions.

5. At its fifty-third session, the General Assembly considered the recommendations contained in the report of the Secretary-General on environment and human settlements (A/53/463), including the proposals regarding linkages among and support to environmental and environment-related conventions. In its resolution 53/242 of 28 July 1999, the Assembly supported the proposal for the facilitation of and support for enhancing linkages and coordination within and among environmental and environment-related conventions, including by UNEP, with full respect for the status of the respective convention secretariats and the autonomous decision-making prerogatives of the conferences of the parties to the conventions concerned, and emphasized in that regard the need to provide UNEP with adequate resources to perform that task.

6. In pursuance of Assembly resolution 53/186, the present report provides an overview of the action taken to implement part IV.A, in particular paragraph 119, of the Programme for the Further Implementation of Agenda 21. The report highlights the growing recognition within the United Nations system of the linkages among the various environmental areas and the significant collaborative work undertaken in response to the need for continuing policy coherence in this field. The report attempts to provide an overview of the progress made, first, in the field of scientific understanding of ecological linkages and, second, in the development of responses by the United Nations system, as well as developments at the intergovernmental level that have given further guidance to enhancing coordination among the environmental and environment-related conventions.

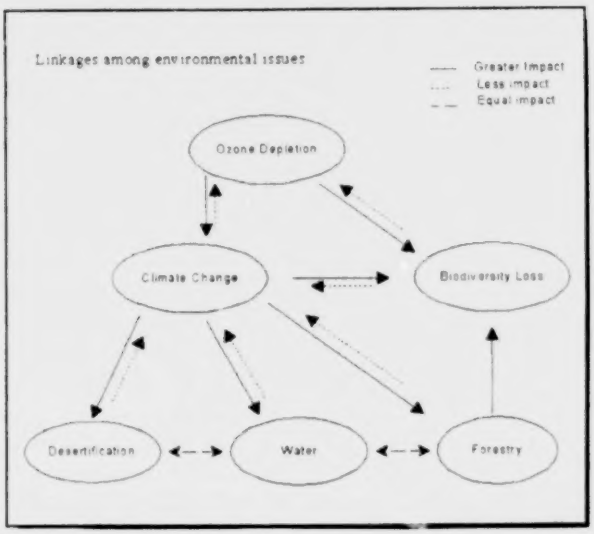
II. Scientific and conceptual approaches to interlinkages among environmental and environment-related conventions

7. The Programme for the Further Implementation of Agenda 21, adopted by the General Assembly in resolution S-19/2 of 28 June 1997, highlighted the need for coordination among the conventions opened for signature at the United Nations Conference on Environment and Development. This marked a growing recognition that, while each instrument emanating from that Conference has its own defined objectives and provisions, as well as governance mechanisms, there are also inherent linkages and cause-and-effect relationships among them since they address specific aspects of ecosystems that increasingly have to be approached in a holistic manner.

8. There is a need to improve the scientific understanding of these interlinkages and of the interaction of the ecological system with human activities. In recognition of the need to advance knowledge on the integrated nature of global environmental problems that must underlay any successful approach to enhancing policy coordination at the intergovernmental level and collaboration among the convention secretariats, UNEP and the World Bank, with the assistance of the United States National Aeronautics and Space Administration, published a report in November 1998, *Protecting Our Planet: Securing Our Future*.[5] Directed at policy makers who represent their Governments at the negotiating sessions of environmental conventions, as well as managers and planners in national ministries, the central message of the report is that scientific and policy interlinkages among major global environmental issues should be addressed in a more holistic manner if sustainable development is to become a reality. The report explores the scientific and policy synergies among the major environmental conventions and analyses, in a comprehensive

manner, the linkages, both physical and biochemical, among key environmental issues. The report presents the scientific bases for such linkages, which have been drawn from international scientific assessments conducted over the past 10 years and which have involved thousands of experts from academia, Governments, United Nations agencies, industries and environmental non-governmental organizations. It further highlights the need for a better understanding of the linkages in order to avoid making decisions that simply benefit one environmental issue at the expense of others. It also attempts to illustrate the current scientific understanding of the interfaces among the global environmental issues (see fig. below).

Linkages among environmental issues



Source: *Protecting Our Planet: Securing Our Future* (United Nations publication, Sales No. E.99.III.D.75).

9. The report also examines the linkages among the following global issues: climate change, loss of biological diversity, and forestry; climate change and water resources; biodiversity, loss of forests, and water resources; desertification and its links to other global issues; and stratospheric ozone depletion, climate change and biodiversity.

10. Three key recommendations emanate from the report, including the need to address global environmental issues and in turn meet human needs more effectively; the need to address global environmental issues in an integrated manner, using many of the same policy instruments and technologies that are currently utilized in a sectoral manner but in different combinations; the need to develop new partnerships involving Governments, the private sector, academia, non-governmental organizations and civil society at the global, regional and national levels; and the need to adopt wise, cost-effective and adaptive management approaches that can be implemented at the present stage.

11. Addressing the issue of improving national and international policy coordination, the report proposes specific measures for national policy integration and specific options to be considered with regard to potential mechanisms to improve coordination among convention-related activities. With respect to international policy coordination, the proposed series of options includes, *inter alia*: (a) integration of national reporting requirements; (b) design of training and capacity-building programmes that cover issues related to more than one convention; (c) cooperation among the convention bodies in producing integrated scientific assessments that examine the linkages among ecological processes; (d) cooperation in producing materials to inform the public of the relationships among environmental issues; and (e) exploring the potential for integrating the meetings of the convention bodies insofar as timing and location.

12. The report stresses that the major policy-making challenge to achieving policy coherence entails the design and implementation of policies that address environmental problems in a cost-effective manner and that can be implemented in the context of a weak institutional framework, lack of political will, limited human and financial resources, and vested interests.

13. These conclusions were echoed by a recently released report, *Global Environment Outlook 2000*.[6] This report notes that the common ground among many global conventions is becoming increasingly apparent and provides room for synergy and avoiding duplication of effort. The report recommends that coordination among multilateral environmental agreements and regional agreements needs to be strengthened in several areas, including cooperation among secretariats, implementation at the national level, and monitoring of performance at the regional and global levels.

14. As a follow-up to *Protecting Our Planet: Securing Our Future*, the World Resources Institute, in collaboration with the World Bank, the United Nations Development Programme (UNDP) and UNEP, will attempt to contribute to furthering the understanding of the scientific interlinkages among environmental issues in a report on millennium ecosystem assessment, which is to be completed in 2000. Building on a variety of assessments of specific ecosystems that are now under way or planned, the millennium

assessment will seek to give greater visibility to the findings of the existing processes and thus assist in avoiding duplication of effort.

15. Another important contribution to greater understanding of the scientific interlinkages among environmental issues was made by the secretariat of the United Nations Convention to Combat Desertification in Those Countries Experiencing Serious Drought and/or Desertification, particularly in Africa in a report, submitted to the Conference of the Parties to the Convention at its second session, on collaboration and synergies among Rio conventions for the implementation of the United Nations Convention to Combat Desertification (ICCD/COP(2)/7). The report provides the rationale for joint initiatives on synergies and highlights the scientific and technical linkages among issues addressed by conventions signed at the United Nations Conference on Environment and Development. With regard to scientific and technical linkages, the report emphasizes the fact that desertification leads to a reduction in the world's food-producing potential, the destruction of vegetation, and diminution of many plant and animal populations and, eventually, loss of species. Furthermore, desertification can increase atmospheric dust, which can then modify the scattering and absorption of solar radiation in the atmosphere. The report examines the scientific and technical linkages: (a) between desertification and biodiversity, focusing on biological diversity, vegetation diversity and desertification, and dryland development, in particular, salinization of irrigated land; and (b) among climate change, biodiversity and desertification, focusing on climate change and vegetation, and global climate change and regional desertification.

16. With a similar concern, the secretariat of the Convention on Biological Diversity has signed a series of memoranda of understanding with the secretariats of biodiversity-related conventions (e.g., Convention on International Trade in Endangered Species, Convention on Migratory Species and the Convention on Wetlands of International Importance Especially as Waterfowl Habitat (also known as the Ramsar Convention), the Intergovernmental Oceanographic Commission, the World Bank, the Food and Agriculture Organization of the United Nations (FAO), the World Conservation Union (IUCN), the Cartagena Convention for the Protection and Development of the Marine Environment of the Wider Caribbean Region, the United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization (UNESCO) and the secretariat of the United Nations Conference on Trade and Development.

17. The Conference of the Parties to the Convention on Biological Diversity has adopted a joint work plan with the secretariat of the Ramsar Convention, which provides a framework for a series of activities intended to promote the implementation of both conventions. An important element in the joint work plan is the development of activities to understand the ecological linkages between the two conventions. The Subsidiary Body on Scientific, Technical and Technological Advice of the Conference of the Parties to the Convention on Biological Diversity welcomed the result of the seventh meeting of the Conference of the Parties to the Ramsar Convention and accepted its invitation to designate the Chair of the Subsidiary Body as a permanent observer on the Scientific and Technical Review Panel of the latter Convention.

18. The executive secretaries of the Convention on Biological Diversity and the United Nations Convention to Combat Desertification signed a memorandum of cooperation on 31 July 1998, which not only outlined general measures for cooperation but also contained specific proposals on the development of joint scientific assessments. At its fourth meeting, the Subsidiary Body on Scientific, Technical and Technological Advice assessed the status and trends of the biodiversity of dryland, Mediterranean, arid, semi-arid, grassland and savannah ecosystems and considered options for their conservation and sustainable use. The Subsidiary Body requested the Executive Secretary of the Convention on Biological Diversity, in consultation with the secretariat of the United Nations Convention to Combat Desertification, to prepare, for submission to the Subsidiary Body at its fifth meeting, a draft programme of work for the biome.

19. At its fourth meeting, in June 1999, the Subsidiary Body requested the Executive Secretary to prepare, for the consideration of the Conference of the Parties at its fifth meeting, a detailed proposal that would address the issue of peer review and scientific assessment of the Convention, drawing upon the experience of the United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change and the Montreal Protocol on Substances that Deplete the Ozone Layer. In this respect, the Subsidiary Body requested the Executive Secretary to consider, *inter alia*, the relationship between any proposed assessment and existing assessments of relevance. These include: the FAO Global Forest Resources Assessment 2000; the report on climate change impacts, adaptation and mitigation, prepared by Working Group II of the Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change; the special report of the Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change on land-use, land-use change and forestry; and the Global International Water Assessment. Moreover, organizations such as DIVERSITAS, the International Geosphere Biosphere Programme, the Global Terrestrial

Observing System, the Global Ocean Observing System and the Global Climate Observing System are carrying out assessments which address issues of relevance to the Convention. The Conference of the Parties, at its fifth meeting to be held at Nairobi from 15 to 26 May 2000, will consider the relationship between these activities and the Convention on Biological Diversity.

III. Intergovernmental guidance and developments at the institutional level

20. Better scientific assessment of ecological linkages among environmental conventions, improved coordination, harmonized approaches and mutually supportive activities have been variously mandated in articles of the multilateral environmental conventions. Over the past year, a series of activities have responded to decisions of the conferences of the parties and other competent bodies. In response to the guidance provided by intergovernmental bodies, including the conferences of the parties, the General Assembly and the Governing Council of UNEP, the secretariats of the environmental conventions and other entities of the United Nations system have given considerable attention and have undertaken continued and more concerted efforts to enhance collaboration among the secretariats of the decision-making bodies. Some of these experiences, which respond to General Assembly resolution 53/186, are reviewed below.

A. Convention on Biological Diversity

21. The benefits and importance for the Convention on Biological Diversity of cooperation with other processes have been consistently emphasized by the Conference of the Parties to the Convention. At its fourth meeting, held in May 1998, the Conference adopted decision IV/15[7] concerning the relationship of the Convention with the work of the Commission on Sustainable Development, biodiversity-related conventions and other international agreements, institutions and processes of relevance. Implementation of that decision, and cooperation in general, forms a central element of the overall programme of work for the Convention and its secretariat.

22. The secretariat of the Convention has developed a global biodiversity calendar of events which contains details of relevant meetings organized by other processes; the calendar is a means not only to promote coordination and cooperation between the Convention and other processes, but also to facilitate the contribution of other processes to the work of the Convention.

23. The secretariat has supported and participated in a project on harmonizing the reporting requirement of biodiversity-related conventions (the Convention on International Trade in Endangered Species, the Convention on Migratory Species, the Ramsar Convention and the Convention concerning the Protection of the World Cultural and Natural Heritage (also known as the World Heritage Convention)). The World Conservation Monitoring Centre completed an initial feasibility study, the results of which were considered at a meeting of secretariat information managers, held in October 1998. Follow-up to the results of this initiative are expected to form the framework of the activities of the secretariat in this area for the foreseeable future. The first steps in these joint efforts have included, *inter alia*, the establishment by the secretariat of an electronic mailing list and a joint Web page.

24. Following the seventh session of the Commission on Sustainable Development, the Subsidiary Body on Scientific, Technical and Technological Advice adopted recommendation IV/7 on the development of approaches and practices for the sustainable use of biological resources, including tourism, in which it advised the Conference of the Parties to adopt its assessment of the interlinkages between tourism and sustainable development and to convey this assessment to the Commission on Sustainable Development, as well as to parties to the Convention and Governments. In particular, it recommended that the Conference contribute to the development of international guidelines for activities related to sustainable tourism development in vulnerable terrestrial, marine and coastal ecosystems, habitats of major importance for biological diversity and protected areas, including fragile mountain ecosystems.

25. With regard to activities to enhance public awareness of the Convention, the Conference of the Parties, at its fourth meeting, considered article 13 of the Convention, which provides a focus for broad-ranging initiatives to increase the number of stakeholders. By decision IV/10 B, it acknowledged that mechanisms for developing public education and awareness about the issues raised by the Convention were central to achieving the goals of the Convention. By the same decision, the Conference invited UNEP and other relevant international organizations to continue to use existing initiatives and to develop further its information dissemination and public-awareness activities in support of the work of the Convention. In this respect, it was acknowledged that there were significant opportunities for synergy with the efforts of the Commission on Sustainable Development. The Conference also invited

UNESCO to consider launching a global initiative on biodiversity education, training and public awareness and requested the Executive Secretary to explore the feasibility of such an initiative and to report to the Conference at its fifth session on the progress made in that regard.

B. United Nations Convention to Combat Desertification

26. In its report submitted to the Conference of the Parties to the United Nations Convention to Combat Desertification at its second session (ICCD/COP(2)/7), the secretariat of the Convention addressed several of the areas for synergy among the conventions, such as:

(a) Science, systematic observation, research and development, transfer, acquisition, and adaptation and development of technology;

(b) Capacity-building, including approaches for work at the global, regional, subregional, national and local levels;

(c) Information systems, including exchange of information, networking and clearing-house mechanisms;

(d) Financial mechanisms (e.g., the Global Environment Facility (GEF) and the Global Mechanism of the United Nations Convention to Combat Desertification, hosted by the International Fund for Agricultural Development);

(e) National reporting and communication of information;

(f) Principles and procedures, including terms and definitions, measures to resolve questions of implementation and mechanisms for the settlement of disputes.

27. The report proposed several steps for the identification of priority areas and modalities for cooperation, including:

(a) Formulation of specific action at the national level further to develop cooperation among focal points of the various conventions with a view to enhancing synergy, and the need for further guidance from the respective conference of the parties on a joint synergy initiative;

(b) Continuation of the dialogue among relevant convention secretariats and international organizations with a view to identifying areas of synergy and providing joint assistance to national focal points for the formulation of national reports and communications;

(c) Continuation of the collaboration initiated with other secretariats and relevant international organizations, such as UNDP, UNEP and GEF;

(d) Development of a joint initiative to support the development of databases on education and public-awareness materials in collaboration with UNESCO and IUCN, among other organizations, to provide cost-effective assistance to national focal points.

28. After considering the above-mentioned report, the Conference of the Parties adopted decision 8/COP.2,[8] on collaboration with other conventions. Taking note of the report by the secretariat on collaboration and synergies among the Rio conventions for the implementation of the Convention, the Conference of the Parties, *inter alia*:

(a) Requested the secretariat to take steps to implement that report in consultation with other relevant secretariats and to develop, as appropriate, a memorandum of understanding to define their collaboration and cooperation;

(b) Also requested the Executive Secretary, in preparing documents for the Conference of the Parties, to seek, as appropriate, the views of and inputs from relevant convention secretariats, as well as from relevant international organizations, agencies and institutions.

29. During the second meeting of the Conference, a ceremony was held on 8 December 1998 for the signing of the UNEP/UNDP biological diversity conservation project document for the participatory rehabilitation of the degraded land of the arid and semi-arid areas along the border between Mauritania and Senegal. The $12.2 million, five-year project, funded by GEF and implemented by UNEP and UNDP, will seek to protect biodiversity by targeting five critical ecosystems encompassing 60,000 square kilometres. A second UNEP project funded by GEF will rehabilitate indigenous vegetation in the degraded range lands of Africa's arid zone, in particular in Botswana, Kenya and Mali, while a third will rehabilitate degraded lands and biodiversity in Mozambique, Zambia and Zimbabwe.

30. A UNEP/GEF desertification project, the funding of which is contingent upon climate change benefits, is taking place in the pastoral areas of Benin, Burkina Faso and the Niger. Because trees and other plants absorb and store greenhouse gases from the atmosphere, returning dryland vegetation to health simultaneously enhances carbon sinks and thereby reduces the effects of climate change.

C. United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change

31. The secretariat of the United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change recognizes that attention paid to linkages among subject areas addressed by the various conventions, and their related intergovernmental processes, can enhance the coherence of intergovernmental action, the synergy of secretariat activities and the impact of both on public awareness. It considers the Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change an essential partner in the exploration of such linkages, since they are often best approached from the basis of scientific assessment.

32. The secretariat has received some encouragement from the parties to the Framework Convention to work with the secretariats of other conventions, notably those of the United Nations Convention to Combat Desertification and the Convention on Biological Diversity, and, within this context, support cooperative action that might lead to specific practical results of interest to the parties to the Framework Convention.

33. In the proposed programme budget for the biennium 2000-2001, some staff resources are made available specifically for outreach activities, including activities on linkages to other conventions and other United Nations entities. Ideas have arisen from discussions held among the secretariats of the three conventions and UNEP regarding coordinated activities on public-awareness raising. After discussions with the secretariats of the other two conventions, the secretariat of the Framework Convention is preparing an internal project to examine areas of synergy among the three conventions at the national level for the preparation of reports. The secretariat of the Framework Convention continues its bilateral discussions with the secretariat of the United Nations Convention to Combat Desertification on a range of issues that could result in better cooperation, including substantive issues, as well as on administrative, conference support and information technology areas. The secretariat of the Framework Convention is also developing bilateral cooperation with the Sustainable Energy and Environment Division of UNDP on linkage activities, including the development of a Web site that would be able to search the databases of the national focal points of the three conventions and of the Forest Principles agreed to at the United Nations Conference on Environment and Development.

D. United Nations Environment Programme

34. The Nairobi Declaration on the Role and Mandate of UNEP,[9] adopted by the Governing Council of UNEP on 7 February 1997, provides the fundamental reference point for the focus and strengthening of UNEP. In adopting the Nairobi Declaration, the Governing Council agreed that one of the core elements of the focused mandate of UNEP should be furthering the development of international environmental law, including the development of coherent interlinkages among existing international environmental conventions. The Nairobi Declaration was endorsed by the General Assembly in the Programme for the Further Implementation of Agenda 21.

35. At its fifth special session, the Governing Council of UNEP, in its decision SS.V/2 of 22 May 1998,[10] concerning the revitalization, reform and strengthening of UNEP, affirmed that the future activities and organizational structure of the secretariat of UNEP should, *inter alia*, be fully in line with the mandate contained in the Nairobi Declaration, and agreed that the enhanced coordination of environmental conventions should be one of the areas of concentration of the activities of a stronger, more effective and revitalized UNEP.

36. At its twentieth session, the Governing Council adopted decisions 20/17 of 5 February 1999, and 20/18 and 20/28 of 4 February 1999, which all present elements for strengthening the role of UNEP, in cooperation with the convention secretariats, to support and coordinate, as appropriate, collaboration and the promotion of interlinkages among multilateral environmental conventions in line with the decisions of their respective conferences of the parties.

37. In this regard, decision 20/28 of the Governing Council, on promoting interlinkages among global environmental issues and human needs, is of particular relevance. In that decision, the Governing Council requested the Executive Director to continue to address global environmental issues within a more holistic and synergistic policy framework so as to improve the scientific and policy interlinkages among global environmental issues and the ways in which they influence ability of countries to meet basic human needs, taking special note of scientific and policy linkages among global and regional environmental conventions and other relevant international agreements. It also requested the Executive Director to recognize that effective policy implementation that links global environmental issues and sustainable development requires, *inter alia*: scientific understanding of the nature of the links among environmental issues; identification of innovative

combinations of policies that are effective and cost-efficient and that encourage the public and the private sectors to work together; setting of realistic goals in addressing global environmental issues and identification of creative paths for achieving them; and improved coordination among the national and international institutions charged with developing and encouraging the adoption of policy and measures to meet human needs, without undermining the environmental foundation for development.

38. Since the fifth special session of the Governing Council, the secretariat of UNEP has been restructured along functional lines and the Division of Environmental Conventions has been established. The overall objective is to support the development of coherent interlinkages among the conventions, in cooperation with their respective conferences of the parties or governing bodies, and the promotion of their effective implementation, consistent with their provisions and the decisions of the conferences. The Division will focus on promoting the development of complementary policies and approaches among the work programmes of related global and regional environmental conventions and processes; supporting, in conjunction with the subprogramme on policy development and law, the development of new international conventions and agreements, including protocols; and coordinating the programmatic support of UNEP for work concerning the conventions and related international agreements and processes, with a particular focus on programmatic interlinkages.

39. It is envisaged that the Division of Environmental Conventions, in line with the recommendations in the report of the Secretary-General on environment and human settlements (A/53/463), will further explore the feasibility of organizing regular consultations between the bureaux of the Governing Council of UNEP and of the conferences of the parties to environmental conventions with a view to identifying cross-cutting issues among work programmes and assisting in the proposal of a common policy and programmatic approach. Similarly, UNEP will facilitate consultations with heads of secretariats, including the heads of scientific and technical bodies of conventions, to define areas of complementarity and avoid unnecessary duplication.

40. The Executive Director of UNEP has undertaken a variety of actions to implement Governing Council decision 20/28 on promoting interlinkages among global environmental issues and human needs.

41. The report *Protecting Our Planet: Securing Our Future* [5] has been widely disseminated in the past year, in particular during meetings of the conference of the parties to the various global conventions and during meetings of their respective subsidiary bodies.

42. From 5 to 7 July 1999, UNEP convened the second meeting on regional seas plans of action at The Hague. The meeting afforded UNEP an opportunity to highlight the linkages between not just the regional seas plans of action, but how they relate to global conventions, assessments and initiatives.

43. Another measure taken by UNEP to strengthen its role in promoting collaboration among the conventions is the initiative involving the secretariats of the biodiversity-related conventions and the World Conservation Monitoring Centre on harmonization and information management for biodiversity-related treaties.

44. UNEP has placed special emphasis on assisting developing countries in the process of negotiating multilateral environmental conventions through the revitalization and strengthening of its support to the African Ministerial Conference on the Environment. As one illustration of this support, from 19 to 23 October 1998, under the auspices of UNEP, the African Ministerial Conference met at UNEP headquarters in special consultation on the United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change and its Kyoto Protocol and related multilateral environmental agreements. The technical meeting comprised presentations and an exchange of views on the Kyoto Protocol, with a special focus on the clean development mechanism, the interlinkages among the conventions on climate change, protection of the ozone layer, desertification and biological diversity, GEF, and the legal and institutional linkages underpinning the conventions.

E. United Nations Development Programme

45. At the field level, the Sustainable Energy and Environment Division of UNDP supports developing countries in the development of their capacities and efforts to implement the environmental conventions and other international agreements. In that regard, the Division started a consultative process on approaches to enhancing synergies in the national implementation of conventions. At a meeting held at Sede Boqer, Israel, from 17 to 20 March 1997, some 30 experts involved in implementing the agreements at the national and international levels concluded that instituting synergies among the parties would undoubtedly lead to a more cost-effective use of resources.

46. UNDP is also playing a lead role in the working party of the Development Assistance Committee of the Organisation for Economic Cooperation and Development on development assistance and the environment, concerning the work programme for the implementation of global conventions. A consultative process, led by UNDP, was developed with the secretariats of the conventions. After a discussion of the outcome of the consultations and recommended action, the working party requested that further steps be taken by UNDP and the Government of the Netherlands as co-leaders in the implementation of the work programme.

F. United Nations University

47. An international conference on synergies and coordination among multilateral environmental agreements was held at the United Nations Centre at Tokyo, from 14 to 16 July 1999. The conference, organized by the United Nations University (UNU) in cooperation with UNEP, the Global Environment Information Centre and the UNU Institute of Advanced Studies, was attended by 300 participants, including representatives of the secretariats of multilateral environmental agreements, Governments, the academic and scientific communities, and intergovernmental and non-governmental organizations.

48. The objectives of the conference were to: create public awareness and awareness at the governmental and intergovernmental levels of the importance of synergies and coordination among multilateral environmental agreements; survey existing initiatives; foster discussion and interaction among international institutions, scholars and other relevant stakeholders who can cooperate in the identification and examination of opportunities; and identify mechanisms, the steps to be taken and feasible paths forward on this important issue. The main outcome of the conference was a series of recommendations on the promotion of interlinkages among multilateral environmental agreements in the areas of harmonization of information systems and information exchange, finance, issue management, scientific mechanisms, and synergies for sustainable development.

G. Commission on Sustainable Development

49. The Commission on Sustainable Development, at its ninth session to be held in 2001, will discuss, as a cross-sectoral theme on its agenda, information for decision-making and participation and international cooperation for an enabling environment. This will provide an opportunity for the Commission to consider relevant aspects of work carried out under international conventions and agreements related to the environment and sustainable development within the broader context of activities aimed at the implementation of Agenda 21 and the Programme for the Further Implementation of Agenda 21.

IV. Conclusion

50. The process launched in the various intergovernmental forums for enhancing linkages and fostering a coherent and coordinated implementation of environmental and environment-related conventions has resulted in considerable progress, which is reflected in increased scientific understanding and the concerted action taken by various United Nations entities. While the work on providing hard scientific evidence of linkages continues to evolve as we learn more about these issues and their significance, consideration could now be given to developing coherent and carefully planned interventions for implementation at the national level and to identifying the specific issues that each convention can address with one or more of the other conventions.

51. Future work in this area, in particular the achievement of a better understanding of linkages among the conventions related to environment and sustainable development, could strengthen the capacities of Governments to participate effectively in the work of the respective conferences of the parties, facilitate the implementation of conventions by parties at the national level through the elaboration of integrated national strategies, and promote more coherent and effective international support for national action.

52. The development of coherent policy approaches also provides a basis for the identification of specific issues of common concern for global and regional environmental agreements. This would facilitate the further development of policy responses towards addressing emerging cross-cutting issues such as trade and environment, including the interface between and implications of, trade regimes and negotiations in the context of the efficient and effective implementation of the multilateral environmental agreements.

53. The General Assembly is well positioned to play a guiding role in establishing broad policies and providing impetus to furthering the coherent implementation of international environmental law at the national level. The Assembly might also wish to identify ways in which to

encourage the continuation of ongoing work in this area, in particular in response to paragraph 119 of the Programme for the Further Implementation of Agenda 21.

Notes

[1] See *Report of the United Nations Conference on Environment and Development, Rio de Janeiro, 3-14 June 1992* (United Nations publication, Sales No. E.93.I.8 and corrigenda), vol. I: *Resolutions adopted by the Conference*, resolution 1, annex II.

[2] A/AC.237/18 (Part II)/Add.1 and Corr.1, annex I.

[3] See United Nations Environment Programme, *Convention on Biological Diversity* (Environmental Law and Institution Programme Activity Centre), June 1992.

[4] A/49/84/Add.2, annex, appendix II.

[5] United Nations publication, Sales No. E.99.III.D.75.

[6] Published on behalf of UNEP by Earthscan Publications Limited, London, September 1999.

[7] See UNEP/CBD/COP/4/27, annex.

[8] See ICCD/COP(2)/14/Add.1.

[9] See *Official Records of the General Assembly, Fifty-second Session, Supplement No. 25* (A/52/25), annex, decision 19/1.

[10] Ibid., *Fifty-third Session, Supplement No. 25* (A/53/25), annex I.